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AUTHOR Malik, M. F.
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ABSTRACT

The potential impact of cultural factors on how an audience perceives the content of a film or television program is briefly reviewed as background for this description of courses on "national values" offered in Montreal for film and television-makers. Information patterns identified and labeled as "national values" include (1) historical-hereditary group, where the same or similar expression of events, thoughts, attitudes are shared by a group of people across a certain time, generation, or tribe; (2) ethnographical group, where the similarity of expression is cued to a certain geographical region inhabited by one or several cultures; (3) ethnopolitical group, where the similarity of problems is cued to a certain social or political structure, regime, or tradition; and (4) ethnocultural group, where the expression of craftsmen and artists is mainly created and shared by a certain group of inhabitants. Emotional and rational impacts are discussed in reference to the perception of films and television programs with strong national, cultural emphases. Communication analysis, research, and programming are considered as possible tools for young artists to find out if there is a correspondence between their ideas and the way in which audiences perceive them. (JEG)

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PROJECTION OF NATIONAL VALUES INTO FILMS AND TELEVISION PROGRAMS

Dr. M. F. Malik

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Dr. M.F. Malik:

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INTRODUCTION:

When a young film or television-maker produces a film or television program, he/she intuitively projects his/her own cultural background into the artwork. Sometimes, cognitive attempts are made to include his/her cultural or political statements via the film or television program.

The finished artwork is performed to audiences of the same or different cultural backgrounds. Suprisingly, a young artist finds that his/her ideas are understood or accepted in different perspectives than his own, or differently from the intended content of work.

This situation happens frequently when media artwork is circulated internationally. But a very specific situation is created for young talent in a multi-cultural country like Canada. Here, large segments of English and French population live in the same cities, with numerous ethnic groups of European and Asiatic immigrants. They all have a residue of previous (home country) national values, overlayed with a common "Canadian" sphere of values. In addition, the neighbourhood of the United States creates a large and influential spillover of national values from the United States.

Teaching young film and television makers in Montreal, we face daily the delicate dilemna of steering the content and form of their future films and television shows, in the midst of professional dilemnas of several English and French radio and television stations and production houses, pouring out daily their conflicting statements regarding current affairs, cultures and entertainment styles.

I. "NATIONAL VALUE" IN FILMS AND TELEVISION PROGRAMS

According to current cultural anthropologists (Carpenter, Schramm) and semantics (Osgood), there are a few basic groups of information patterns, which are labelled as "national values":

1. Historical-Hereditary Group, where the same or similar expression of events, thoughts or attitudes are shared by a group of people across a certain time, generation or tribe (race).
2. Ethnographical Group, where the similarity of expression is cued to a certain geographical region, inhabited by one or several cultures.
3. Ethnopolitical Group, where the similarity of problems are cued to a certain social or political structure, regime or tradition.
4. Ethnocultural Group, where the expression of craftsmen and artists are mainly created and shared by a certain group of inhabitants.

1. In film and television, the first group (Historical-Hereditary) mostly touches the content or story of the film, and it is expressed by the artist as such. Observing students in the past few years in our school, the most pressing problem is the incomplete understanding of history or hereditary symptoms of value. They usually pick up the element or historical facts in isolation and mount the story around it. Or they like to arrange their own hierarchy of historical and hereditary values. To steer these attempts, we arranged our curriculum to include a special course, entitled History of Media Carriers, which is geared to the explanation of basic values of Western civilization, the hereditary concepts of artistic styles and their developments within Indo-European and American origins.
But we see a difficulty at this point: A young film and television-maker does not want to occupy himself with the far past or with history. He/she loves to express contemporary problems and values. If he uses history, it serves only as a parable

or an analogy. When it is used, however, it usually serves the positive "national values", such as national pride, national destiny, or a national quest.

2. Ethnographical Values are mostly evident in film and television locations, places where the film or television-maker works, shoots, films or produces the television program. There is one basic problem in this area:

   A. A film or television program produced by a "stranger" to the community (a film or television-maker going to a far-off location, shooting a film "about" some other people or country).

   B. A film or television program produced by a "member" of the community (a film or television-maker from the same environment shoots a film about "his/her" own country, for themselves, or for others in the world).

A. As a tool for a young film-maker going to a strange, far-off country or an unusual geographical place, we have developed a special course, entitled Communication Analysis, which applies the approaches of a system theory and cybernetics, allowing the artist to assess the media potential of the landscape, urban environment, interiors to the possible use for his/her own film or television program location, with regard to the perceptions of the local audience.

B. For the artist producing a film or television program from his/her own geographical background, there is a course, entitled Media and Community Development, based on a successful Canadian experiment with Challenge for Change and with reference to experiments for minority broadcasting and film-making (films and television programs made by and for Canadian Indians and Eskimos).

In both aspects, we tried to follow a practical, post-teaching approach, too:

A. In the first case, there is a program for media volunteers, where students go into a far-off country (India) and develop, with local institutions, a film or television or radio program, and have first-hand experience in a cross-cultural media impact.

B. In the second case, we have in our school each year a few students from Asia and Africa, who are returning to their countries after completing their studies. Therefore, we can follow how they apply the knowledge from our course, Media and Community Development, directly to their countries.

3. Ethnopolitical Values are, to date, the most controversial and unsettled problem in the work of a young film and television-maker. They are also heavily biased. First, there is always a degree of alienation ("everything old people say is bad, and everything young people wish is good") and attachment to a certain social group (an artist growing up as "poor" or among "poor people", expresses this group favorably, etc.) In addition, a young person who is very sensitive may fall into a strong association with a certain political or social movement, and from that point on he/she is not able to relate to any opposing or differing thoughts). There is also an especially strong democratic feeling among our students that the freedom of political beliefs and its expression is one of the basic rights of a Canadian citizen.

Within this context, the following occurs at our school:

We do not believe in any kind of political or social steering or persuasion of our students. A humanistic approach is probably the most pressure we may apply when the content or style of a young film-maker's work becomes subversive or obscene. Otherwise, our students are free to choose any doctrine, ideology or political movement for their artworks, with one distinction - that of target audience. We ask the author pertinently to relate his/her ideas to their future potential viewers, and relate to their thoughts, statuses, social and political beliefs.

Indirectly, we have instituted in our curriculum, courses such as "Film Ideas", "Organizational and Political Communication and "Mass Communication". These courses deal, on a theoretical level, with different political schools, ideologies and their application to media of film, radio and television. We do pay attention to persuasive

methodologies, although we do not encourage our students to use them predominantly. Our courses "Seminar in Propaganda" and "Advertising and Public Relations" show our students strongholds of political or commercial persuasion, but we do not accept persuasive artwork for diploma projects.

4. Ethnocultural aspects of national values are expressed both in the content and the style of the artwork. It is the most undefined group of what is called "national values". It can range from the cultural heritage of art, to the popular culture of songs, fashions, industrial designs, rhetorics or dances, and many other aspects which, altogether, we call "culture". Probably, the common denominator of a cultural artifact is a perceptual, not a functional one. Whenever we start to look, observe, or hear a certain event or thing and start to reflect this happening in our brain - instead of using the same material or event only - the cultural aspect starts to dominate. Therefore, media like film or television is ideally suited for this purpose. But not all the footage of a finished film or television program has a factually ethnocultural impact. From the informational impact measurements we have carried out in our research laboratory, we found that barely 10-15% of the overall information impact has the characteristics of cultural information.

We have tried in our school to touch on this area in several courses: "Media and Media Culture" is an introductory course in the thinking process for story development and major media tools for story expression. "Inter-cultural Communication" is a specialized course for students who will be producing films and television programs for culturally different people, either in developing countries, or by students from different cultures themselves. "Psychology of Communication" is geared mostly to the aspect of media artwork perception and communication effects of film and television.

So far we have experienced that the ethnocultural aspect starts to emerge in the

third, or exceptionally in the second year, of study after the mastering of technological and syntactical questions of media production.

II. COMMUNICATION AND PERCEPTION OF "NATIONAL VALUES" TO FILM AND TELEVISION AUDIENCES

One area which is not usually followed closely at film and television school, is the area of audience. When a film or television program is edited or performed at a festival or before a professor's jury, the process of teaching is formally finished.

We do not believe that this is enough, if you are supposed to create a new artist, not as an exceptional being living in limbo, but as a member of society, working positively toward its values.

Therefore, we have instituted in our school a special stream of education, occupied with the measurement and assessment of the film and television information impact on audiences.

The rationale behind this is relatively simple: If a person sees a film or television program, he must somehow perceive it, think about it and reflect this thinking in future behavior.

The realization of this program is far from simple: To prepare, check, pre-test and verify diagnostically the findings of one simple film and a small group of people (say 10 - 25), takes a few hours or days.

But so far, we are the only one in Canada, and one of the few places on the North American continent, doing this kind of research which is incorporated into our teaching program.

There is a cluster of three courses available for students who are extremely interested in how their films and television programs are perceived by an audience, or how well they communicate initial ideas to them.

Communication Analysis is a course that deals with the system assessment of the idea, story or location. It is possible to relate the method to the structural linguistics or to the system theory approach with the ingredients of cybernetics. Communication Analysis prepares an artwork (film, radio or television program), so that you can identify the audience's reaction with a single small unit of artwork (a shot, gesture of actor, motif of music, color or line of set-design), and prepare the time-log for future tests.

Communication Research is a course that deals with the testing of an audience through the perception of a film and television program. Methodology ranges from psychological and psychometric questionnaires, to controlled observation, and finally, application of the newest biotelemetric methods of electronic extraction of data from the cortical parts of the human brain.

Communication Programming is a course that deals with the application of test results in the creation of films and television programs. It shows the artists how the audience's tastes, wishes or desires can be implied - without him being "on the tail" of the audience, or missing the audience's response completely.

So far experiments with this program have been limited. At first, the artist (young film or television-maker) is afraid to use technology in the process of creation, especially if his film or television teacher is a person with high intuitive potential. In addition, when he/she masters the test technology, then the opposite becomes true: the young film or television-maker begins to be dependent on the test results, and is guided by the audience's tastes, which is equally unsatisfactory. Finally, it takes a period of several months in which the artist starts to use the research or programming tool, only when he/she needs it, or if the situation is too difficult or unfeasible to be solved intuitively.

Our research program shows the following in regard to the communication and perception of national values by audiences:

1. There are <u>two distinct impacts</u> created by the perception of films and television programs with strong national, cultural emphasis:
   (a) A <u>rational</u> impact evoking responses of specific neuron circuits in the brain's cortical region; this response shows a high probability of <u>memory</u> storage. It functions more effectively when the perceptual input can match some of the earlier experiences.
   (b) An <u>emotional</u> impact evoking responses of "stress waves", chain reactions in the brain's cortical region. This response shows high changes of mediators on the neuron synapsis; consequently, it indicates a possible change of attitudes or tastes.

2. If the "national" characteristics are imbedded in the content of the film or story (plot), there is usually more response on the specific neuron circuitry. Therefore, it depends more on the ability of combinatory thinking, or generally, on the intelligence of a person, on how much will be memorized from such a showing.

3. If the "national" characteristics are more profound in stylistic or formal statements of the film or television program, stress waves are likely to develop in the human cortical regions, causing inclinations or changes in attitude.

4. If the film or television program with national values of one cultural groups is shown to different cultural groups in an audience, profound changes in stylistic or content message delivery are registered. Generally, the specific neuron circuitry is influenced in the earliest stage; then, the processing of the information from artwork is degraded to the simple understanding of "formal content" (simplified plot), or, known stylistic, shape or sound features of presented realities. Basic misconceptions or misbeliefs can be registered and memorized to a great extent in this case.

3. The information cascade and its time syntax (editing scheme) is very pertinent to the "value" message delivery. The tighter the overlapped cascade of shots or information presented, the more formal approach the viewer takes for the understanding of content - up to the point where several "value" messages are compressed into a single one, which may not correspond with the original idea. This happens frequently when a film or television show is performed to an audience with different perceptual speeds. This is the case where persuasive aspects of media occur predominantly.

There are other aspects, each pertinent to the specific audience or specific artwork.

CONCLUSIONS

1. There are several groups of "national values" in film and television program:
   - historical, hereditary values
   - ethnographical values
   - ethnopolitical values
   - ethnocultural values

2. There are distinctive ways by which the "national values" are perceived by an audience of films and television programs. Communication Analysis, Research and Programming are possible tools for young artists to find out if there is a correspondence between their ideas and the way in which audiences perceive them.

3. The impact of "national values" of films and television programs varies with the ways in which the artwork influences the audiences' brains, and in which succession or combination of ideas are delivered.